



Department of Justice

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DEFENDANT IN COLOMBIAN NORTE VALLE DRUG CARTEL **EXTRADITED TO THE UNITED STATES**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A leader of the North Valle Cartel, one of Colombia's most powerful cocaine trafficking organizations, has been extradited by Colombia to the United States to face racketeering and drug charges, the Department of Justice announced today.

Jairo Aparicio-Lenis arrived in Florida yesterday and was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he has been charged by a federal grand jury along with eight other leaders of the Norte Valle Cartel. The April 29, 2004 indictment charges the cartel leaders with violations of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) and with distributing cocaine knowing and intending that it would be unlawfully imported into the United States.

Aparicio-Lenis is scheduled to make an initial appearance today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Deborah Robinson at 1:30 P.M. at U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia.

"The extradition of Jairo Aparicio-Lenis demonstrates the commitment of the United States and Colombia to work together to end the flow of illegal drugs," said Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. "Together with our allies abroad, we will continue pursuing those who would bring illegal drugs into this country, regardless of where they may be."

According to the indictment, Aparicio-Lenis was a member of the Norte Valle Cartel, responsible for laundering the cartel's cocaine proceeds. The cartel operated in the Norte Valle del Cauca region of Colombia, the cities of Cali and Buenaventura, Colombia, as well as Mexico and the United States. Between 1990 and the present, the cartel allegedly exported more than 1.2 million pounds of cocaine – worth over \$10 billion – from the Pacific coast of Colombia through Mexico to the United States. The Norte Valle Cartel conducted financial transactions which laundered millions of dollars in drug proceeds.

The Norte Valle Cartel allegedly used brutality and violence to further its goals. Members of the cartel used murder as an accepted practice to eliminate rival drug traffickers, buyers who failed to pay for cocaine, and cartel members whose loyalty was suspect. In order to protect its distribution routes and cocaine laboratories, the cartel employed the services of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), an illegal armed group in Colombia that has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department. The cartel also relied on the AUC to provide personal protection for cartel members and associates.

“Today's extradition of Jairo Aparicio-Lenis is another crippling blow to the Norte Valle Cartel, ending its reign of terror, fear, drug trafficking and violence,” said DEA Administrator Karen P. Tandy. “As one of the cartel's chief money launderers, Aparicio-Lenis enabled the cartel to flourish with millions of dollars in blood money with which to carry out its deadly destruction. Now, through his extradition, he will face justice on American soil.”

The indictment alleges that the Norte Valle Cartel bribed and corrupted Colombian legislators. Cartel members knowingly engaged in courses of illegal conduct designed to hinder honest government in order to protect cocaine shipments, to prevent the arrest and prosecution of Cartel members, and to block legislation in Colombia permitting the extradition of narcotics traffickers to the United States for prosecution.

If convicted, Aparicio-Lenis faces a maximum sentence of up to life imprisonment on the cocaine-importation charges and 20 years in prison for the RICO charge.

This RICO case is the result of cooperation among U.S. Attorneys' Offices nationwide – including the Southern District of New York, the Eastern District of New York, and the Southern District of Florida – and the Justice Department's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section (NDDS) of the Criminal Division. The investigation that led to the indictment was the product of extensive cooperation between Colombian law enforcement authorities and the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Department of Homeland Security, and the Internal Revenue Service, acting under the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF).

The charges contained in the indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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